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Grande lovers rock out

Partyers recall magic of the 40-year-old ballroom

Delores Patterson / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- After rocking out Saturday night at a concert in Royal Oak celebrating the 40th anniversary of Detroit's legendary Grande Ballroom, Stanley T. Madhatter said he simply had to pay a visit Sunday to the huge decaying building on Grand River Avenue.

"This place was simply magic in its heyday," said the Ann Arbor resident, who emceed a few shows in 1971 and is known by fans of the Grande as the Reverend of the First Rock and Roll Church of America.

"I had to come out here and pay my respects and say a prayer. We used to really rock out."

The Grande Ballroom opened in October 1966 as a hippie dive/concert venue and has become a symbol of a time when music became a culture, even a revolution.

The venue regularly drew acts ranging from Led Zeppelin to B.B. King and launched careers of Motor City icons like Iggy and the Stooges and the MC5.

On Saturday, The Royal Oak Music Theatre played host Saturday to "A Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of Rock and Roll at the Grande Ballroom," that featured Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, Canned Heat, and Third Power featuring Drew Abbott -- all of whom played the Grande back in the day.

Detroit resident Michele Lundgren walked around outside the Grande reminiscing about seeing Pink Floyd and The Who with husband Carl, whom she met at the ballroom as a teenager the summer of 1967.

"He was the poster artist for the Grande, and I was a groupie," Lundgren said.

"So it's been wonderful to come back and celebrate a great time in our lives.

"It gave a lot of kids from the suburbs a place to escape and feel like they truly fit in. It was a very free spirited time and we were a bunch of young artists, poets and musicians who all came together to express ourselves and listen to some fantastic tunes," she added.

"I'll never forget it."

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